

The Islamic World: An Interpretative Analysis of Great Power-Dynamics in the Post-Arab Spring Middle East

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to understand the current waves of democratic transitions in Middle East, which is dominantly comprised of Muslim societies. As a reality, Democracy is remained elusive in the Middle Eastern Islamic World throughout the Cold War and even post-Cold War period. As the entire region is seen as an infertile space for western conceptions of civil society, freedom and a governance model that seeks to give universal franchise. However, the Islamic concept, like "Shura". The current political systems in the Middle Eastern-Islamic world portrays a political reality, which is rooted in history as the region was largely ruled by authoritarian regimes for much of the post-war era, from Saddam Hussein in Iraq, to the Asad in Syria, to the assortment of Kingdoms in the Arabian Peninsula. This view however is now being challenged due to eruption of a series of events unfolding at a lightning speed yet ironically long unforeseen and quite unexpected. The emergence of a widespread set of protests primarily against economic injustices and social exclusion, what is called the Arab Spring, sweeping through the countries of the Middle East is a testament to a democratic transition where a youth-led social transformation movement fueled by the middle class is transforming the nature of Middle East politics. The altered political reality has forced many of the established dictators to abandon their thrones and the new regimes are now supplanted by contested democratic dispensations. This paper then concludes that United States (US), while a key arbiter of the Middle Eastern-Islamic World scene for much of the last several decades, has adopted a policy aiming at expansion and deepening of this democratic transition and movement, but with a hesitant mood in a fear of losing its allies in the region..

Keywords: Shura, Democracy, Islamic World, Middle East, Great Power Politics

Introduction:

At the beginning of the 21st century, global politics is once again in for tectonic shifts and it is undergoing a slow yet discernable transition as great power realignments and reconfiguration of power is forcing nation-states to adjust their policies and practices according to emerging realities in the realms of politics, new ways of economy and creation of wealth. Especially in post 9/11 era, the Islamic world dominated the limelight of global politics. Islamic world, primarily Middle East faced great socio-political transitions, whether it is war of terror, economic rival, or call for democratic transitions through the episodes of Arab Spring in Islamic societies.

The post-Westphalia diplomatic history is a great testament to different transitions occurring at various levels of state and society. The recent unfolding of events in the last few years in the Middle East provides an intellectual landscape to construct our understanding, in relation to the intensified political transitions in the Islamic societies, particularly since the advent of Arab Spring. Further, how Islamic societies are contributing in the emergence of new regimes and power structures within these otherwise referred to be highly conservative societies. In addition, it is not only about the changing pattern of political dynamics, but also about changing notions of geo-political landscape of Middle East that is transforming into what can be termed as the Greater Middle East, which somehow over laps to other regional formations in the region and beyond. This Greater Middle East further includes other Islamic states

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stretching from Morocco to Pakistan. In an interesting and highly telling observation Brzezinski (2007) refers to the new geographical landscape of the Middle East as new the "Global Balkans" due to ongoing political transitions and its impact on global politics.¹

Lately as the Syrian civil war unfolded from 2011 onwards the US, arguably the world's still "sole superpower" has directly and indirectly launched series of attacks on Syrian government forces or its proxies several times.² The Syrian regime is bolstered by Russia, which has threatened to target any US-led coalition attacking or violating Syrian sovereignty directly embattling the two erstwhile great powers. As the US and Russia are slowly sucked into the hegemonic competition in the Middle East the whole question of geopolitical dominance of either power hangs in the balance. It is in this context that the risk of escalation with Russia, that the breakdown of Iranian nuclear deal can also be evaluated as Iran is a close Russian ally in the Syrian theatre.

As the chaotic situation unfolds the potential for conflict between the US and Iran is a real possibility for which Tehran is likely to respond to counter the US in the Middle East by exerting more aggressive influence over Baghdad. And, the complexity of coalitions, alliances, and power politics is then a riddle that must be understood in the framework of long-range trends at the dawn of the twenty first century conflict. This paper will, then try to shed light on these developments by investigating the background of US foreign policy engagement in the broader middle east and how the long-standing and close partnership with key actors who invariably were dictators and autocrats both in Iran and Iraq, and continue to be in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen overshadows contemporary realities on the ground.

Background of the Study:

The transition in Middle East like other regions is in continuity for centuries, a brief recent glimpse portrays the political history of this region through colonial engagements, evolution of nationalism to formation of independent nation-states and later ruled through authoritarian regimes throttling the democratic values.³ While, the globalization of democratic ideals allowed the origin of an era of political awakening, which gradually engulfed Muslim societies in Middle East to raise their voices against authoritarian and unjust systems. And today, this endless and long political tumult is largely shaped and propelled by the emergence of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. The youth-fueled angst at the ancient regime across the Middle East has now come to be known as the Arab Spring predicting on demands for inclusive and accountable democratic politic systems that uphold the values of human rights, equity, rule of law, economic opportunity for all.

Interestingly, in contrast to historical episodes of political or social revolutions, the contemporary shift is driven by the rise of social media which has introduced new forms of political culture through providing cyber space as a landscape for political participation. As a result, social media supplanted traditional revolutionary leadership with a new kind which can be called as the "digital leadership."⁴ This means today revolutions are driven by either digital forces or referred to be leaderless political transitions. Recent era examples of Arab Spring, in which the revolutions kicked off in number of Muslim Countries that initially started at Tunisia, moved on and spread to Islamic countries like Yemen, Egypt, and Libya and now they are actively fueling discord in Syria and with low intensity in Bahrain as well.

The revolutionary slogans in favor of democracy gathered a huge support, as the Arab world had woken up to a new transformation in which the tyrant authoritarian leaders of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen are quickly sacked from powers, while others, notably in Syria and Bahrain have been struggling to retain their authority.⁵

The post Arab Spring episodes of rapidly changing political dynamics deeply impacted Muslim states in the Middle East, but also the re-engagement of hegemonic competition in the region is witnessed between the major global and regional player to re-balance the status quo. This was not the first time, hegemonic competition occur in Middle East, rather the historiography of this region has observed recurrence of hegemonic struggles. Therefore,

the recent history proves that the Middle East has remained one of the top foreign policy and security agenda for US as global hegemon during Cold War and even before. The region is important for geo-strategic and geopolitical reasons, mainly due to region's significance in natural resources particularly oil. End of Cold War provided a historic opportunity to the US as an indispensable global hegemon tried to reshape the political outlook of this critical geopolitical region to consolidate its interests and also to project American power in the region and beyond.

It is instructive to think that the US foreign policy towards Middle East was not initially to support the democratic ideals for the region. In fact, most of US allies in Middle East are authoritarian regimes in nature. For example, the continued US engagement with Iraq during the 1980s is to counter revolutionary the Islamic Republic of Iran. This engagement shifted into rivalry due to clash of US interest with Iraq specially to protect Kuwait's Oil Fields, which initiated the first Gulf War. Furthermore, in 2003 Iraq war that planned to deter Saddam regime from so-called possession of "weapons of mass destruction (WMD)", which later declared US intelligence failure.⁶

To counter unfriendly authoritarian Muslim leaders like Saddam Hussain in Iraq, US signed 'Iraq Liberation Act' and it became as law under President Bill Clinton. During G.W. Bush period, officially it referred as 'regime change' and 'freedom agenda' in Middle East.⁷ Both, Afghanistan and Iraq became vivid examples here to justify the core idea of 'regime change' and 'freedom agenda'. In order to pursue the policy of regime change and freedom agenda, the 'Bush Doctrine' emphasized on 'preventive action' to tackle future threats and justification for peace to be restored.

Within this background the political conditions after the Arab spring raise many questions; whether US is proposing a flexible policy towards Middle East or frames a grand strategy for the Greater Middle East. Some political analysts observe it as the "forward strategy of freedom"⁸ that would guarantee political rights and political participation particularly in the Islamic world, as an antidote to Islamic extremism. On similar lines, another strategy was proposed under the policy agenda of "Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI)."⁹ Implementation of such strategy definitely faced a complex set of challenges by accommodating dictators or royal families versus Containing Arab Nationalism towards a strategy of freedom and making benign conditions for a political culture that embraces new democratic norms.

Even though, there are tremendous challenges for US policymakers to tackle the complexity of Middle East, but the recent political changes clearly reflected that Arab leaders have become unpopular among masses and dealing with serious demographic, social, economic and political challenges. Interestingly, by and large, Arab leaders have stayed in power for more than two decades. For instance, these Arab leaders who ruled most of Islamic countries in the Middle East are; Mammur al-Qaddafi ruled Libya since 1969; the Asad family is ruling Syria since 1970; Ali Abdullah Saleh ruled Yemen since 1978; Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt since 1981; Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali ruled since 1987; Hashemites are controlling political affairs in Jordan since 1920; in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia the family of Al-Saud is in power since 1932; and in Morocco the Alaouite dynasty is influential since 17th Century.¹⁰

Global Agenda Behind the Arab Spring:

Within this backdrop, this paper then seeks to analyze how US policy towards Middle East is grounded in a carefully crafted and executed policy agenda, which clearly reflect current scenarios and political outcomes. In this connection, it is easy to see how the regime change and freedom agenda were stimulating factors in Middle East, that help us link the recent Arab Spring moves in many parts of Middle East. Moreover, this paper then seeks to lay bare the nexus between power and conflict and how the intersection of global agendas shape outcomes on the ground.

The discussion part is divided into three parts:

- a) The US and the Arab Spring

b) New Deal or False Starts?

c) Getting it done.

The first part is important as it helps us to carefully appraise the significance of Middle East and then the role of US in the region in post-Cold War period - more specifically policies framed in response to the tragic events of 9/11 and an assessment of post 9/11 era. Therefore, the first part is discussed under two sub categories: 1) US policies after 9/11 and 2) The Middle East Recast at 2018.

Second part of the paper is primarily case studies of Arab Spring: these cases are focused on Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. All cases are different from each other; yet they are similar in terms of conditions that galvanized the political upheaval in the respective countries. Finally, examine the US reaction or response to the political transitions in these Muslim societies. The third part is conclusion of the discussion. The conclusion draws some recommendations concerning US policies towards the region and the Arab Spring. How these political changes need to be addressed and managed appropriately? What are the favorable and unfavorable choices of action?

The US and Middle East:

In this discussion, it makes absolute sense to talk about the US engagement in the Middle East from 1945-2000 as it was an era of successful promotion of American core national interests including securing oil resources. During the Cold War, US policy towards Middle East remained on three essential points¹¹: 1) Containing Soviet Union 2) Issue of Oil 3) Special Relationship between US and Israel (special commitment to the security of Israel from its neighbors). Cold War objectives remained successful for US, as it somehow contained Soviet Union, uninterrupted smooth flow of oil supply was assured, and US took the lead role of security guarantor in the Middle East including major Islamic states. In terms of human costs, it's 550 as contrast to 50,000 in South East Asia or even less than 4500 in recent Iraq War of 2003. While economic cost was also minimal, during 1945 to 2000 Congress authorized \$ 200 billion to implement Middle East policies spending almost 4 billion USD per year. While cost of recent Iraq war is higher, that exceeds to \$ 750 Billion direct cost involved.¹² On the other hand, Iraq war was an unfinished episode of its first script, which has to be played and needed to decisively act against Iraq acquires WMDs "before it's too late".¹³ US strategists are seriously evaluating the issue of Iran after the collapse of nuclear deal, Syria and Yemen in the region, because if US continuous to push for democratic reforms under regime change and freedom agenda, then its allies in other Islamic states like Saudi Arabia may become victim and decide to join Russian camp.

US strategists also understand that war has not continued to remain a successful political venture so far, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars consumed a great chunk of US budget on one hand and rise of ISIS is posing great challenge to US allies in the region. On the other hand, to implement the regime change and freedom agenda would definitely require a long-term strategy and patience to see things being done in desired ways. For example, in the early years of Iraq war, there was an uprising in Iraq called as the 'Baghdad Spring' of early 2005. It soon withered away, and did not get much popular support as the later waves of Arab Springs had an impact on political transition.

Ignoring a popular uprising in Baghdad in 2005 and US hesitation to fully support Arab Spring generated huge debate about US strategy in the region. Either it was part of Obama's foreign policy of fewer interventions abroad or possible diminishing US influence in an age of multilateral global settings.¹⁴ To appease the US ally in the region like Saudi Arabia, the Obama administration emphasized over an "orderly transition" in the Middle East, so it should not be creating much upheaval against US role in the region.¹⁵ However, in the wake of popular uprising during Arab Spring, the US policy makers seems bewildered to take a decisive decision regarding the demand for democratic rule, which raised a number of questions about US role that is demonstrating a slow approach towards extending support to popular democratic reforms in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, while remain silent on Saudi Arabia.¹⁶

The growing policy shift demand US to abandon the old ruling allies, possibly because of the global and domestic economic issues as key factors. Secondly, US had already engaged in number of post 9/11 conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan actively. Therefore, US did not want to further bear the economic and political burden in the region, as other major stakeholders have been enjoying a free ride in the region. The evolving understanding among Western leadership in fact created a situation whereby rhetoric was pronounced without practical support on the ground. As people, both in Egypt and Tunisia tried to overthrow authoritarian leaders in the support of democracy, but a weak response from Western democracies.¹⁷

Moreover, the Obama administration used diplomatic channels to send out US stance by discouraging the repression of demonstrators that gave a clear signal to Ben Ali, Mubarak and others, the time is up for them and their unpopular stature needs to give up power. However, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi the Egyptian Military Chief carrying out a military coup was another blow to popular voice vis-à-vis to the US commitment towards democratization process in the Middle East.

Going further back to early days of Iraq war, when President G. W. Bush, showed his commitment to use freedom agenda along with policy of regime change found difficulties for its “(mis) application of democratic peace.”¹⁸ As it is referred earlier, US policy towards Middle East remained successful until 2000. In order to maintain the similar nature of policy effectiveness, the changing dynamics of regional and global politics put US in deep pressure to comprise at various policy matters. Especially, after the tragic events of 9/11 the Bush administration went into Afghanistan and Iraq with its two-point policy of regime change and freedom agenda.

Implementation of this policy was a hard task to achieve, since many of authoritarian regimes in the region have provided effective governance to its people than other so-called democratic regimes. In addition, interestingly among many of these governments, Bush administration had to deal with some regimes that remained US allies in the region. Therefore, in this complex situation, US officials had to choose something between its ideological national interests that advocates for popular political participation as a political culture, and its strategic national interests that include smooth flow of oil and gas into international market, and dealing with challenges posed by Iran, Syria and non-state actors.

To implement the policy agenda, US strategists proposed the ‘Arab reform initiatives’ for Middle East. It was understood that, this reform initiative would have a significant impact in years to come. In June 2004, the European diplomats and US initially submitted first draft during the G8 summit. Resultantly during the summit of then G8 at Georgia, the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA) started with a deeper understanding among member countries to support development and education programs in Middle Eastern and North African region.¹⁹

The 2004 G8 summit draft outlined to introduce reforms in greater Middle East, which later took momentum through country specific reform agendas, as seen in case of Jordan’s reform initiatives. Also, in 2004 prior to G8 summit, the government of Yemen organized a regional conference to discuss wide range of issues that include human rights, international courts and democracy to address domestic socio-political problems under the Sana’a Declaration. The Sana’a Declaration reiterated for adoption of serious measures towards introducing democratic principles and end to the occupation of Arab lands. It led to establishing an “Arab Democratic Dialogue Forum” that desired to engage Muslim countries with the ideas democracy, human rights and inclusiveness between government and civil society.²⁰ Though the idea of inclusiveness, consultation and respecting the diversity is already practiced in early days of Islamic state in Medina.

May 2004, a similar kind of Arab League summit meeting held in Tunisia. The summit tried to adopt some resolutions regarding political reforms prior to G8 summit meeting in June 2004, so that Arab nations should not perceive that the Western governments engineered the reform initiatives, rather Muslim countries are driving force towards the

reform agenda. All these processes helped to create “Democracy Assistance Dialogue”, soon after December 2004 meeting of Forum of the Future, attended by G8 members along with their foreign ministers and finance ministers representing 20 Arab countries of Middle Eastern and North African region.

Arab Spring: An Outlook of Popular Uprising in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya:

The Arab Spring or popular Arab revolts in the Middle East against the authoritarian rule put the Democratic societies to think over fate and destiny of these political changes. During these revolts, the entire world witnessed the call for change demanding for the “Dignity, Democracy, Social Justice”; “Bread, Freedom, Social Justice”; and, most direct, “We Want to Live! We Want to Eat!”²¹ These slogans recall the revolutionary days of famous French Revolution of 1789 as an ideal to bring down the despotic monarch or authoritarian rule. It brought a sense of another wave of democratization process in Middle East, which missed its opportunity to embrace with previous waves of democratization during Cold War period. Perhaps, during Cold War period, many of Middle Eastern Islamic countries and some other autocracies had support from Western World, but at the same time, many Western leaders wished to see at some point the “Muslim-majority autocracies can become pluralist democracies.”²²

The fall of autocratic or dictator’s rule were already experienced in South-East Asia like in 1986 against Fernando Marcos of Philippine, in 1998 the long-serving dictator General Suharto of Indonesia fell from power. Even though the rulers such as Lee Kuan of Singapore and Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who were considered to be “soft authoritarians” also gave up their rule on voluntary grounds.²³ It vindicates that the departure of dictatorship in the Middle East will not be unique episode to experience, as recent past have examples of similar nature to witness. Therefore, in the Middle Eastern region, which is largely led by dictators or monarch dynasties, feared of losing their political power.

In order to tackle these political challenges, the oil-rich Islamic states did tried to appease the uprising through offering quick economic reforms, while non oil-rich states like Egypt, Jordan Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen were not able to offer similar reforms package. For instance, the rich Islamic state in the region the kingdom of Saudi Arabia poured \$36 billion to increase salaries, housing subsidies and other social welfare benefits. Similarly, Bahrain additionally paid \$3,000 to each Bahraini family. Qaddafi in Libya promised to double the salaries of government employees and \$400 for every family. The ruler of Kuwait offered \$3,500 to each subject and free food, while the Sultan of Oman pledged to create 50,000 new jobs to address economic issues.²⁴

However, the grown public awareness through political awakening and digital revolution connected all members of Middle East through new digital space to interact and share their experiences about change. The agenda to bring political and socio-economic reform remained a common voice across the Middle East to exalt the human dignity and tackle the issue of absence of responsive government.

Interestingly, the political mobilization is all three selected cases i.e. Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen are unique and different. For instance, in Tunisia, the people launched a massive countrywide protest, and masses flooded towards capital from the neglected rural areas against the corruption and ineffectiveness government of Ben Ali. In case of Egypt the political mobilization originated from Urban and cosmopolitan areas, where the young people organized the uprisings against aging authoritarian leader Hosni Mubarak for his despotic rule and corruption charges. According to estimation, President Hosni Mubarak and his family alone had built a wealth of \$40 billion to \$ 70 billion.²⁵ Finally, in Libyan case the armed rebels from Eastern Provinces ignited the protest against (late) Qaddafi and his rule.²⁶

Tunisia:

Tunisia was the first starting point of Arab revolts, launched against President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Moreover, President Ben Ali was the first Arab dictator to fall in the hands of mass protest. People launched a massive countrywide protest and call for restoring the constitution that was suspended. In addition, Tunisian accused their former leader for his atrocities,

corruption and nepotism under the network became popular as “the family”. People from peripheries of Tunisia came on streets and marched towards Capital to oust Ben Ali. Some of Tunisian economic institutions, namely names the Tunisian General Federation of Labour (UGTT) were equally deriving forces in the Tunisian revolution along with Masses. The Tunisian General Federation of Labor (UGTT), which was created in 1946, has also played a pivotal role during the independent movement of Tunisia against France in 1956. Along the lines, Tunisians had a historic experience of revolt and political mobilizations in the past. In post independent years the prominent political mobilizations were the bread revolt of 1984 and 2008 Gafsa revolt for economic reforms in Tunisia.²⁷

The beginning of Arab Spring in Tunisia is triggered from the incident of Mr. Bouazizi in December 2010. This event created a symbolic yet a massive ripple effect that contributed towards the Arab rising in Tunisia and neighboring states. The economic and social deprivation had already increased the frustration among the people of Tunisia who were educated but unemployed. Mr. Bouazizi, who was a street vendor, set himself on fire in remonstrance over confiscation of his wares and the harassment and humiliation by state authorities. This event provided an emotional round for Tunisians to launch a mass scale protest in the country. Initially, Ben Ali rejected the demands of protesters during his January 2011 speech and declared protesters as hostile against the national integrality and interest are mainly sabotaging the domestic peace on the behest of foreign instructions and allying with terrorism and extremism.²⁸ His statements further aggravated the hostile conditions for his regime.

It is important to mention here that the Tunisians leads the Arab world in its educational system, largest middleclass and well structured middle class. Ideally, the condition in Tunisia meets the basic conditions for a democratic political system. In addition, comparatively, Tunisia has different image as a moderate Muslim country. However, at political domain Tunisia was required to fight against the class divisions manifested in country's political system. Moreover, on economic domain a complete structural adjustment would have addressed the economic challenges. As the gloomy image of Tunisia's economy showed dismal economic performance indicators which put national unemployment rate 16 % in the years of 2000s, while more than two thirds of Tunisian unemployed are below 30 years of age.²⁹ Reason why, the youth bulge in Middle East become core factor in shaping and mobilizing popular revolts across the Arabian Peninsula.

The political institutions especially the role of military to influence Tunisian political system or even during the revolt remained at low scale. Therefore, the Tunisian army played a less significant role in the political process, and it did not contribute in transition of regime or power shift during and after the revolution. It might be because; the Tunisian military has never witnessed or experienced a domestic combat like situation and does not dominate in domestic economy before. The fear among democratic world is, if these moderate young group of people get hijacked by radicals, then it would have been a great backfire to reform agendas. For instance, it was generally observed that the Tunisians are the “most European-influenced of Arab countries,” while the leading Islamist party, Ennahda, is a progressive and modernist party mostly preaching moderation”.³⁰ However, the return of Rashid al-Ghannouchi to Tunisia after 20 years of exile brought a sense of fear among Western leaders that Tunisia might become receptive to Ghannouchi's version of Political Islam.

Before the emergence of Arab Spring, one of Ghannouchi's Fatwas promulgated which advocates the murdering “all civilians in Israel, because there are no civilians in Israel. The population—males, females, and children—are the army reserve soldiers, and thus can be killed.”³¹ Hence, Western leaders believe Ghannouchi's thoughts are based on hatred for others, which is contrary to democratic values of inclusiveness through tolerance and respecting pluralistic norms that Tunisians were looking for.

In these circumstances, certainly one has to be cautious and carefully observe the changing dynamics on Tunisia. US did not want to see emerging number of regimes which turn

against Israel and cause a security threat to entire region. Despite, Islamism directly or indirectly become part of the new Tunisian politics, however, it is also a genuine reality that the Tunisian Islamic thoughts lacks the organizational depth as we can find in the Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. Even though Islamic *Shura* allows political system based on consultation but fearing backfire US policy makers remained reluctant to play an assertive role in favor of democracy in region.

Moreover, the youth in Tunisia anticipate to enjoy the freedom of believe, expression and assembly into system as they already theoretically exposed to it. Consequently, it is noticed that the young population in Tunisia shared some common features, which includes strong sense of ownership towards indigenous political change, a sense of social cohesion that developed stronger connectivity, and seeing their selves as global citizens a product of technological change and increasing networks of communication age.³² As a healthy sign, majority of people in Tunisia agreed to join modern democratic alliance, instead of being tagged with radicalized thought.

Egypt:

Egypt's case was very crucial among all. It has a huge population and one of the large standing Army in the region. Mubarak was US ally in the region and Egypt itself signed Camp David Accord for peace process. Mubarak's regime change put fears; the role of Egyptian military is very crucial, as they hold the power, which was absent in case of Tunisia. In contrast to Tunisia, Egyptian revolt initiated from Urban and cosmopolitan areas. And Egyptians were struggling to redesign their institutions of government. Similar to other cases, Egyptians believe that their government's failure to provide basic services, widespread unemployment and poverty forced millions of Egyptian to come on streets against the ruling elite. The educational standards were also lower in comparison to Tunisia, and poor educational system was in place, while teachers supplement their salaries from private lessons. The revolution in Egypt was well organized than Tunisians, as the protest campaigns honor the killing of blogger Khalid Said by Egyptian police, which resulted huge massive demonstration at Tahrir Square. Resultantly, forcing Mubarak to farewell from his decades long power rule.

In addition to above abstract, the unionists, labors, workers, professionals and youth organized into various groups to oust Mubarak. For example, in January 2011, the unionists established the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) as a core instrument of political revolution that confronted the Egyptian Trade Union Federation's (ETUF) monopoly controlled under Mubarak regime.³³ Seeing the mounting pressure of 15 million Egyptians, who mobilized in the streets of Egypt's capital and major urban centers, changed the perception of Mubarak's ally to discontinue their support for his rule. This massive mobilization in Egypt significantly connects to few active components: "youth re-politicized by their own will in modern forms that they themselves have invented; the forces of the radical left; and the forces of the democratic middle classes."³⁴

These three components have their own objectives despite the common goal to change the regime. For instant, the revolutionary forces desires evolve democratic system to end the tyranny of police and military; establish social order and economic reforms to break away from globalized liberalism; and independent foreign policy that should not be compliant to US dictations and military control of region.³⁵

The significant issue for US and other regional members was to carefully evaluate the options and plan for post-revolutionary period. Over the period, the 'revolutionaries become fragmented' and this fragmentation become visible and realized in later stages.³⁶ Therefore, the revolutionary members and groups were not able to coalesce into a political organization, which could have capacity of conducting an effective election campaign. Despite the Muslim Brotherhood coming into power, the traditional praetorian structure benefitted out of these divides and overthrown the democratically elected government of Mohamed Morsi.

Interestingly, the Egyptians came to street against the military rule of Mubarak, but the military led Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) drive the political outcome and became an active player in the power transition vis-à-vis in the amendment of constitution during later stages of revolution. Though SCAF helped to provide a platform and organize the members for constitutional reform, election arrangements and at the same time Mubarak is given protection under military authorities.

Before the elections, like Tunisia, a fear among the circles of Western World about possible gain of Islamists during the election process. Speculations showed the fear “that when elections were held, Islamists would take over.”³⁷ Mainly this fear germinated as an outcome of popular support gained by the Muslim Brotherhood, who are ideologically linked to the “traditionalist Salafist tendency, [which is] generously financed by the Gulf States.”³⁸ Most significant dimension is to understand that the new revolutionaries had started to enjoy the taste of freedom and protection of their rights. And, they remained quite careful during the selection of future regime that would guarantee the safeguard of the individual dignity, safety and liberty.

The election results gave a victory in favor of the Islamic party in Egypt. The jubilant supporters perceived the election results as a ray of hope to restore a just system, while some feared it with a risk probability drawn from experiences gained during the uprising that “the hyper-conservative Islamist political strength, when the Salafi movement bused several hundred thousand supporters from all corners of Egypt to Tahrir Square, routing all other forces by raising provocative and divisive slogans.”³⁹

In this complex scenario of divided Egypt, the liberal democratic camp was as active as socialists and religious conservatives. Mr. ElBaradei and his likeminded group of people of middleclass kept defending the ‘Bill of Rights’. ElBaradei believed that this bill is essential which can become the pivotal part and instrument of constitution. However, he also understood the vague future of political outcome that remained hard scenario to predict.⁴⁰

Despite winning the popular elections President Mohamed Morsi’s rule was short lived, due to another military coup under General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. General Sisi restored the status quo both at domestic and regional political outlook, as it used to be before popular uprising and became savior for deposed former dictator Mubarak. And the Western democratic forces faltered to act in favor of popular political transition.

Libya:

Libya’s case is also unique and quite different as compare to Tunisia and Egypt. Like other two cases, Libya was not a US ally and the popular uprising in Libya caught favorable attention from US decision makers. In contrast to Egypt and Tunisia, strategically Libya was important for being oil rich country that means Libya ranks “17th as a world oil supplier, it is Africa’s largest oil reserve, producing 1.8 million barrels per day (bbl/d), [while] Libya contains nearly 46.4 billion barrels of oil.”⁴¹ Energy politics and potential oil crisis become a serious factor to focus Libya as an agenda of necessity as compare to other two cases for US, as an agenda of choice. The Libyan episode is not a peaceful demonstration of masses as we witnessed in Tunisia and Egyptian case; rather it was armed rebels from Eastern Provinces escalated the protest.

Armed rebel youth attacking the Katiba military barracks in Benghazi proved the vulnerability of Libyan regime on the streets.⁴² In response, Qaddafi’s mass repression of rebels and uncoordinated supply of weapons to his clan people seek global attention against Qaddafi. This provided a justification for NATO to intervene in the Libyan conflict with a support from UN Security Council resolution against Qaddafi. In contrast to Libyan episode, the authoritarian leaders in Egypt and Tunisia were ousted quickly, while in Libya President Qaddafi resisted with armed forces. His stay in power turned the movement into a civil war between armed groups and loyal to Qaddafi particularly his kin and clan people.

The political episodes in Egypt and Tunisia did not show any global military intervention, as it happened in Libya. As intervention began, number of countries started to accept new transitional rebellion government as legitimate government of Libya. Despite the Qaddafi

loyalists resisted the rebels with heavy weapons, but still a popular denunciation of Qaddafi regime framed a case across the world. The armed rebels pre-dominantly linked intervention in Libya with strategic oil assets, than supporting the so-called democratic uprising. Furthermore, in 2012, some of the rogue rebel forces attacked US embassy in Benghazi and killed diplomatic crew including US ambassador to Libya Mr. J. Christopher Stevens as a result of release of an anti-Muslim video titled 'innocence of Muslims.'

The fate of political leaders in three cases were different as well, for example, in Tunisia and Egypt, both ruling elites survived, Ben Ali absconded with his wife to Saudi Arabia, while Mubarak faced judicial trial. But, the fate of Libya dictator was different as his opponent groups killed him. Since, Libyans got an interim set up, but faced a huge internal strife. Libyans long to recover from bloody civil war and more importantly, owing to lack of social and governmental cohesion a prospect for democratic transition is dream yet to be fruition.⁴³

Libyans not only needed to focus on transition of democratic values in their society, but it has to deal with some of challenges of internal security, issues of anti-personal and anti-tank mines, future of their oil fields, security of oil refineries and employees by planting mines around refineries, and economic challenges which may bring another wave of civil war.⁴⁴

Post Arab spring period was very crucial for both Libyans and its international community to carefully support the transition process.

Conclusion: Hopes & Fears

Middle East is a significantly important region in the world since ancient times. The history of this region vindicates that the Arab peninsula remained at the continental crossroads of trade, politics, science, religion, scholarship and cradle for ancient civilizations that converged in this region. In recent time period, its significance is dominated by the geo-strategic as well as floating over world's largest oil reserves. There are tremendous challenges and opportunities out there, and 'time' factor is very crucial. The cultural context is equally important to tackle the challenges, as geographical context is important as mentioned earlier. Middle East is also become the hub of new "Global Balkans" that encompasses areas stretching from Egypt's Suez Canal to China's Xinjiang region, and extends from up northern Kazakhstan to the south of Arabian Sea.⁴⁵ This region estimates a population of more than 500 million people. And a continuous instability in the Middle East means igniting religious and political passions across the region. The ongoing Syrian crisis has proved that intense ethnic and religious violence that has attracted outside domination by using coercive measures from religiously and culturally alien societies.

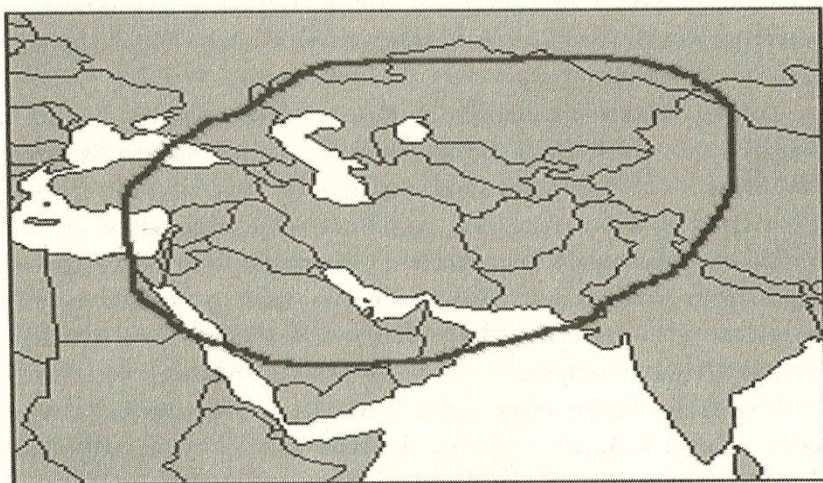


Figure: The Global Balkans (Source: Brzezinski 2007:154)

To respond with a policy strategy towards Arab world, a moment of periodic pause or wait can cause a great outcome, and a quick but irresponsible action can also cause a great havoc. The tragic incident of 9/11 has completely shifted the policy orientations with rising notions of Islamophobia dominated the foreign policy features, and the Middle Eastern-Islamic world is grappling with the evolving and shifting "balance of power between state and society."⁴⁶ As a result two dynamics can be anticipated: 1) growing number of new actors in international politics that are politically significant; 2) these new actors establish transnational connections across the border with the higher intensity of complex interdependence. For instance, many observers see the rise of China as a potential replacement of US hegemony in Middle East and potentially at global scale. And Chinese silent rise is not about echoing democratic slogans rather "China emphasizes political stability over democracy ... a political shift of the Middle East away from America toward China would have a ripple effect on Europe's links with America."⁴⁷

The other challenge US faces is from Islamic and nationalist groups in the Middle East. Number of Islamic and nationalist groups view America's political entry into the Middle East after World War II as a liberating force contributing to the demises of Anglo-French colonial domination. Five decades later, growing number of Arabs, Egyptians, and Iranians were becoming increasingly receptive to the argument that the region was again suffering foreign domination in a new guise.⁴⁸

Foreign involvement in the Middle East is always remained a constant feature; rather it dates back to Napoleon in modern times, when he invaded Egypt. However, the core theme of "*international relations in the Middle East was shaped by the rivalries of non-Middle Eastern states. These rivalries went through several successive phases, like, interference, intervention, penetration, domination, and finally sometimes reluctant, sometimes relieved departure.*"⁴⁹ The actors of drama change from time to time with a modified script, while, stage and basic patterns remains constant.

Being said that, foreign interventions are always fraught with challenges and more particularly in the Middle Eastern Muslim societies. US re-engagement in Middle East through US-Middle Eastern Partnership Initiative (MEPI) stands on basic four pillars, which are to support Middle East in domains of economics, education, politics, and women. These domains were designed to support freedom of speech and equal opportunity for all, so the democracy norms can spread, education can thrive, economies can grow, and women can be empowered. According to Altermanin and others, US faces three paradoxes in the Middle East: 1st, "liberal elite reformers are considered as clients of foreign powers and collaborators in a Western effort to weaken and dominate the Arab World"; Secondly, "Conservatives have intimidated liberals", so they gave up allegiance to authoritarian systems. Third, "most vocal proponents of democracy are Islamists", while interested groups are in isolating, which prompts US, has to focus on dealing with the "regional governments and mass public."⁵⁰

For this purpose, US require to be flexible in terms of its recent hard policies that shall allow to work on multilateral grounds and promote reform through respecting the evolving norms of multilateralism. Any act of unilateral approach shall deem to rapture peaceful transition of political development in Middle East. Greater openness and tolerance in Middle East will benefit US interest and policies. However it is too early to assess the impact of the seemingly isolationist tendencies in the Trump administrating's engagement with the Middle East as "it is hard to get a read on Trump's policy preferences for the Middle East, given that he spoke so little about foreign policy during the campaign other than to categorically disparage the Obama-Clinton team for perceived errors of omission and commission in Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria."⁵¹

The Islamic world understands the values of democratic norms and early Islamic state in Medina laid the foundations on the true spirits of inclusiveness and consultation called *Shura*. However, the colonial and post-colonial political transitions in Middle East have ostensibly

declared the Arab world an infertile soil for democracy. The military intervention or conducting elections will not be sufficed to declare a country as democratic, rather democracy takes time to strengthen its roots, and also depends upon receptiveness and adaptability of its political institutions for democracy in the society.”⁵²

To meet the objectives of core pillars of US-Middle Eastern Partnership Initiative (MEPI), US has to create more global networks, bolster investments in education and health, take a lead in creating economic opportunities, and bring all factions together on genuine dialogue amidst all cultures, so a better level understanding and tolerance towards each other can thrive. In addition, US can help building and strengthening the democratic institutions and foster multilateralism. In this struggle, Turkey can be a great ally in the region to achieve these tasks particularly political reforms in Muslim societies, while Europe a pivotal partner of US can and should play a frontal role in economic development issues in Muslim societies of Middle East. Finally, diplomatic efforts and resolve by the US and its partners to address unresolved political disputes in the region shall be a great leap towards enlarging the shadow of future.

A modicum diplomatic effort is made during the G-8 summit at Deauville, France, the members agreed to pass a declaration in the wake of Arab Spring and initiated a “Deauville Partnership” with Egypt and Tunisia. G-8 affirmed its strong support towards Arab Spring political developments and assure to protect that “the aspiration of people for freedom, human rights, democracy, job opportunities, empowerment and dignity, has led them to take control of their own destinies in a growing number of countries in the region”⁵³. Success in such diplomatic initiatives are likely to win the hearts and minds in Middle East, while defeating forces of retrogression and radicalism because obscurantism doesn’t sell anymore in the information age.

Endnotes:

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